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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 000158

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DEPT FOR EUR/RUS, EAP/K, EAP/J, INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2019

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SUBJECT: MFA URGES U.S. TO TAKE POSITIVE STEPS WITH NORTH KOREA

Classified By: Political External Chief Eric Green for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA Korea's Division officials said the DPRK's confusing array of statements since the start of the year had made the direction of North Korean dialogue uncertain and urged the U.S. to take steps to return dialogue to a positive track. Russia continues to support resumption of the Six Party Talks and remains firm on considering removal of sanctions only once North Korea has demonstrated progress on denuclearization. Should the Six Party Talks eventually resume, the parties would have difficulty agreeing on the agenda. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a January 22 meeting with poloff, MFA Korea's Division Director Alexander Minaev said the DPRK's unusually positive new year's message, followed by the DPRK Defense Committee's threatening response to the ROK's contingency plan, and the DPRK Foreign Ministry's call for peace treaty talks had made unclear the direction of dialogue with North Korea. He said that "the pendulum could swing either way," and that the U.S. should take steps to nudge it in a positive direction. He added that it was up to the "main antagonists," the U.S. and the DPRK, to make the next move. He also urged U.S. officials to continue close and frequent dialogue with Russian counterparts, noting that Russia is the only partner who can easily engage all parties in the process. He added that Ambassador-at-Large Grigoriy Logvinov stood ready to consult with U.S. counterparts and is "full of ideas" on North Korea.

¶3. (C) Minaev said Russia was disappointed, but not surprised by the hostile reaction of the DPRK Government Defense Committee to the ROK's contingency plan for a collapse of the North Korean regime. He said there had been hope that 2010 would bring a new atmosphere of cooperation and understanding between the two Koreas, but that this now appeared unlikely. South Korean Embassy contacts said Russian officials believed that South Korean President Lee would call for a North-South summit ahead of ROK mid-term elections in 2010, despite ROK assurances to the contrary.

¶4. (C) Minaev reiterated Russia's position that the DPRK should return to the Six Party Talks and added that steps to reduce sanctions should begin only once the DPRK had made progress on denuclearization. On the DPRK's desire for a peace treaty with the U.S., Minaev said Russia could be comfortable with discussions on a treaty as long as the ROK was included. (Note: Separately, Institute of Oriental Studies Korea's expert Alexander Voronstov told poloff on January 20 that the North Korean Embassy Counselor explained

to him that the DPRK would like to hold peace treaty talks with the U.S. in parallel to the Six Party Talks. End Note).

¶5. (C) While he did not expect the Six Party Talks to reconvene in early 2010, Minaev pointed out that developing the agenda for resumed negotiations would be a "big headache" for the Six Party representatives. He said reaching consensus would be difficult on how to handle Japan and South Korea's unfulfilled heavy fuel oil pledges (Russia and the U.S. fulfilled their pledges), the abduction issue (Russia sees this as a distraction), the role of the IAEA in future talks (Russia strongly supports this), and verification.
Beyrle